FHR

FINNISSY AND THE GUITAR

Complete Works (1966–2022)

Sam Cave

Diego Castro Magas

Mēla Guitar Quartet

Vickers Bovey Guitar Duo

Michael Finnissy (b. 1946)

Two Cut-Ups of Three Fantasias by Alonso Mudarra (1966–67) * **[7:54]**

1 I. [4:47]

2 II. [3:06]

3 **Song 17** (1976) * **[5:43]**
Sam Cave *guitar*

4 **Albion on the Road to Hell** (2019) * **[15:42]**
Mela Guitar Quartet
(Matthew Robinson, George Tarlton, Daniel Bovey, Zahrah Hutton)

5 **Nasiye** (1982 rev. 2002) **[11:34]**
Diego Castro Magas *guitar*

6 **Felix Namque** (2012 and 2021) * **[3:14]**
Sam Cave *guitar*

7 **Normal Deviates** (2017) † **[8:19]**
Vickers Bovey Guitar Duo
(Julian Vickers, Daniel Bovey)

8 **Outcast** (2020–22) † **[18:39]**
Sam Cave *guitar*

Total Timing: **[71:26]**

* Première recording • † First commercial recording

FINNISSY AND THE GUITAR
Complete Works (1966–2022)

Michael Finnissy (b. 1946) is rightly considered one of the most significant composers in British musical life today, or at any time. His enormously prolific output contains music for all instruments and voices in solo compositions and in a beguiling kaleidoscope of eclectic combinations and has been internationally celebrated, published, performed, and recorded with one exception; his guitar music. This recording project celebrates Michael's 80th birthday by bringing together all of his music for solo guitar and guitar ensemble for the first time, performed by the dedicatees of the works, or those players most associated with them.

Michael's guitar music spans almost 60 years of his career and reflects his developing style and musical preoccupations. Some of it was composed as recently as the Covid-19 pandemic (*Outcast*), whilst some of it has lain dormant in Michael's personal archive for over half a century and has been rediscovered, played, and heard for the first time as part of this project (*Two Cut-Ups of Three Fantasias by Alonso Mudarra*).

As Michael returned to the guitar multiple times over a long period, the instrument has clearly captured his imagination, the sound of the guitar having ensnared and inspired him.

Coordinating this project has been an extraordinarily rewarding experience for me. To have worked so closely with Michael on this recording, from inception to release, has been a huge joy and I feel very lucky to have spent all of this time with such an inspiring musical mind and wonderful person. Hearing all of the special musicians on this disc play Michael's amazing music has given me so much pleasure; I hope it will now do the same for you.

Sam Cave, London, August 2025

Sam Cave (SC): Your guitar music spans a period of almost sixty years; what is it about the sound of the instrument that has kept bringing you back to the guitar?

Michael Finnissy (MF): The evocative and seductive timbre of the guitar is surely what attracts most people to the guitar; the varieties of plucked-attack and controllable resonance. For my own future uses I took particular note of Webern's discreet use of the guitar in two of the orchestral pieces, *Op. 10*, and within the ensemble textures of Schoenberg's *Serenade, Op. 24*, and especially in Boulez's *Le Marteau sans maître*, and as a solo instrument my fondness for Italian music drew me to Aldo Clementi's works, and then the obvious Spanish sources.

(SC): You told me that the Two Cut-Ups were some of your first pieces to utilise 'cut-up' technique as a structural principle. What lead you to experiment with that idea, and why did you choose the guitar as a vehicle for those pieces, as I believe you had never written for it before?

(MF): I had a particularly lively 6th Form at school, with the poet Alan Brownjohn as form-master, and class-mates who were keen on 'progressive' American literature: Kerouac, Ginsberg, McClure and William Burroughs. I found back-numbers of Grove Press's *Evergreen Review* (Nos. 11 and 16) in Better Books basement, and read about Burroughs, now famous for his novels *Naked Lunch* and *Soft Machine* – the titles are metaphoric – drug-fuelled, fragmented and disordering experience. They still seem accurate evocations of contemporary life: walking down any crowded city-street, the turmoil, confusions of cultures, and life-choices. Writing, and then cutting-up a straightforward paragraph, and jumbling-up the bits and pieces: terrible and melancholy Actuality! I was having difficulty getting to grips with 16th-century counterpoint at college, chanced on Dowland and Mudarra – exploring counterpoint on a single line – and I was intrigued by the economy of gesture. So I copied out random groups of Mudarra's notes, and re-ordered them, and found interesting and (I thought) 'strangely beautiful' results. I was exploring abstract 'technical machinery', the concept of polyphony, and its conventions. I was finding things to do with pitches and rhythms. I made an arrangement for piano, part of a series of *23 Poems/Fantasies*, which didn't work: *Learning!*

(SC): While I was studying and practising Song 17 I came to call its textures and gestures 'magical whispering' and, whilst they are physically very challenging, they are very guitaristic in nature. In what ways did you need to modify your usual working practices, especially in terms of pitch and register, to allow these textures to fit on the guitar so well?

(MF): I don't play the guitar, but I was in Montepulciano at the time I wrote *Song 17*, and had a guitarist in the room. What I wrote is due to Roberto Porroni, his guidance and clear teaching. One can become intoxicated with the sound, and forget about continuity and structuring. It was a summer course

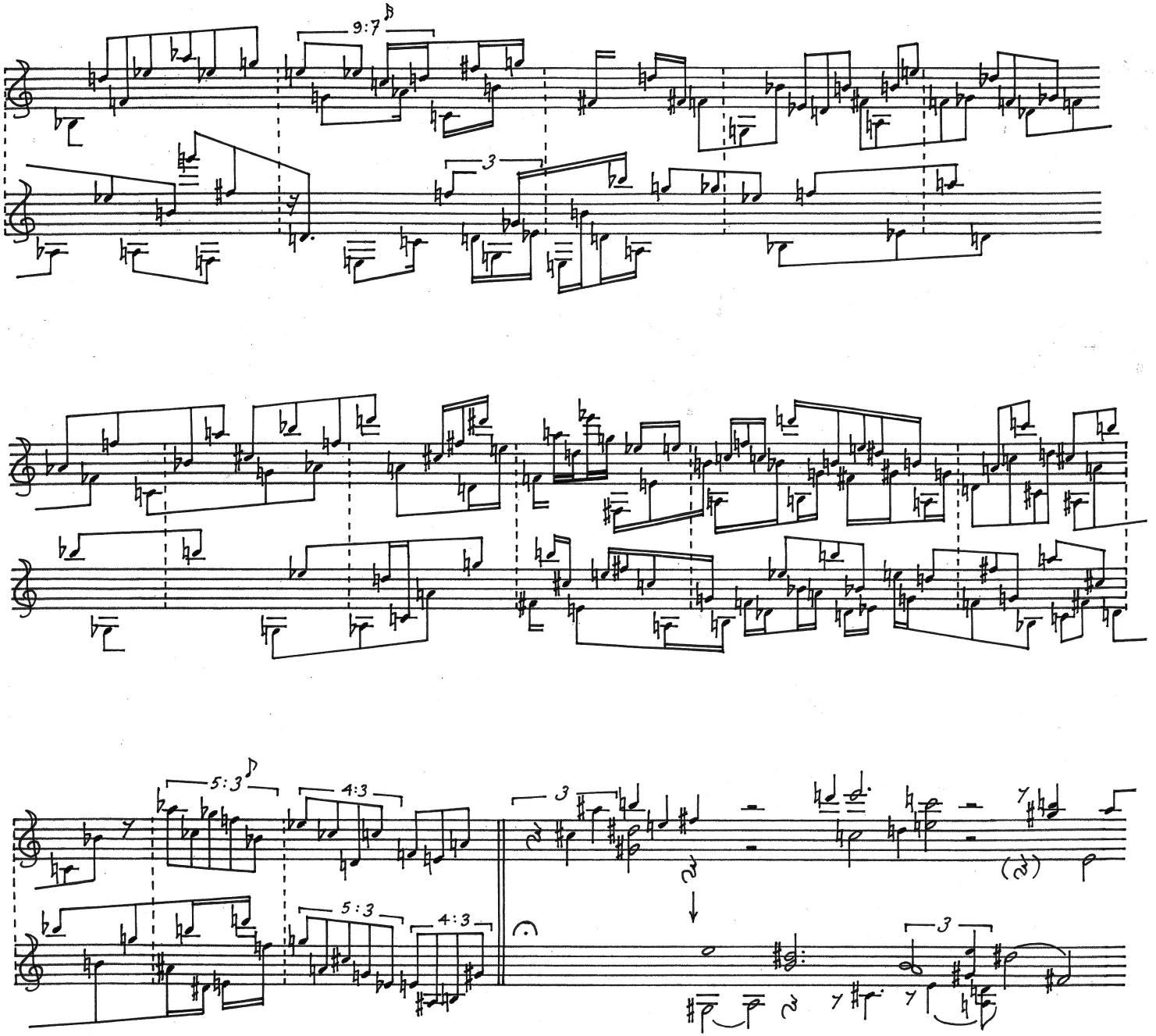
with Henze and Maxwell Davies. The piece had to be ready in two days: hopefully a meaningful juxtaposition of active and suspended lines: zany patterns and frozen tremolandi. I probably had some sort of pitch-sets for reference and some sort of consistency, plus instinct and (limited) experience.

(SC): Two Cut-Ups, Nasiye, and Felix Namque all show your interest in music from other times and cultures. Can you give some insight into how you go about incorporating these elements into your pieces? How do they sit alongside, or combine with, original material? How do the seemingly disparate elements of a piece come together, and what holds them together structurally?

(MF): Other times and cultures inevitably co-exist, and become part of a creative dialogue with my, and other people's Present. I was brought up just after the second World War, at a time when some people were concerned to re-build society and culture, and encouraged to respect, forgive and work alongside other peoples and cultures, and not fall victim to prejudice or ignorance. Mine was not a child-intensive environment. I mostly met and conversed with adults, and not all were English. I was surrounded by books, with which I developed an enjoyable and relaxed relationship, and I showed a deep interest in music from about age four. I actually fear my own limitations of taste, and deplore those of my countrymen. I try to be aware of what my enthusiasms and passions may represent to other people, but in essence – I work empathically. Remembering music is ambiguous and widely misconstrued. I like to bring things together – what the word 'com-position' implies, I encourage and enjoy difference, eccentricity and non-conformity in structures. I prefer to take risks than observe 'trusted and true' ways of working. I have to rely on my imagination, sense of timing, eyes and ears to tell whether things 'hold together'. 'Good taste' has very little to do with it.

(SC): In 2017 you wrote for an ensemble of guitars for the first time when Dan Bovey commissioned the duo Normal Deviates. Two years later two more guitars were added when you wrote Albion on the Road to Hell for the Mela quartet, again at Dan's request. A guitar ensemble is an unusual creature, as all the instruments have the same method of sound production and occupy the same register. It is also something unique to the guitar world; I don't know of any violin quartets touring around, although there are great pieces for groups of celli by Boulez and Radulescu! What were the main challenges, and rewards, of writing for guitar ensemble?

(MF): Dan had given a superb performance of *Nasiye* at the R.A.M., and I was delighted that he asked me to write the duo, and subsequently, the quartet. I was also very grateful for his sensitive involvement during the composing of both, as all composing is challenging in one way or another, for composer and performer(s) alike. Four guitars need not sound

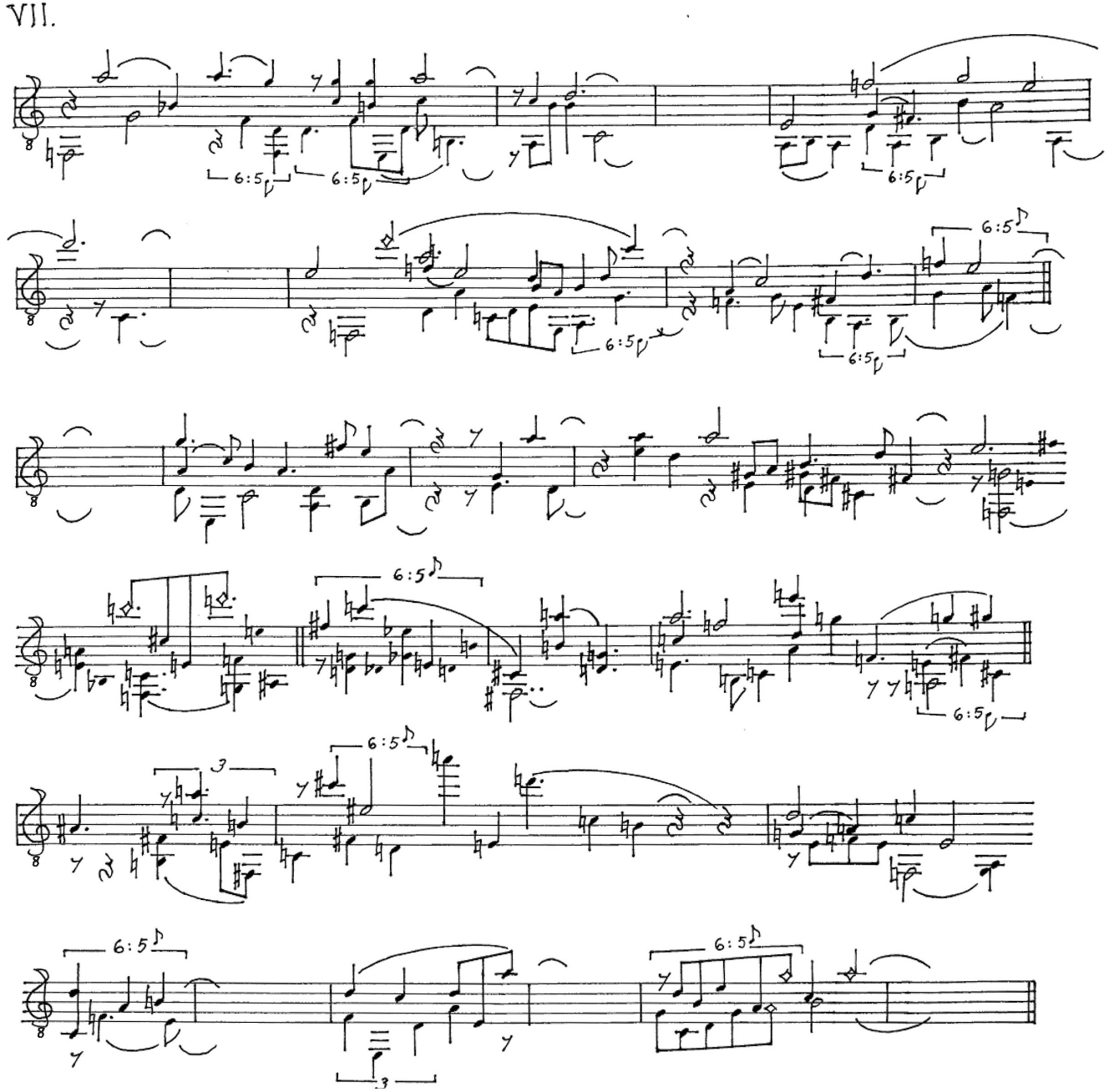
extract from *Normal Deviates*

monochromatic, as it is quite possible to diversify textures, registers and types of 'attack', or even quadruple and unify a single gestural type. These are choices rather than challenges. I am pleased with both pieces, so the rewards have been plentiful, at least for me.

(SC): It was a great pleasure and privilege for me to work with you on Outcast, which is your largest solo guitar work to date. Can you tell us about the intricate and important relationship between the music that you composed, the fragments of music by other English composers such as Shelbye (d. 1584) that you incorporated, and the ninth century Welsh poem Claf, and what they contribute to the atmosphere of the piece and its technical underpinnings?

(MF): Thank you Sam, it has been a very great pleasure to work with you as well. I was very touched by your initiative, support and interest. À propos of which, I think you will find Shelbye haunting the corridors of *Felix Namque* rather than the Welsh countryside of *Outcast*... I have, for decades, enjoyed the poetry, wisdom and friendship of Harry Gilonis, whilst also harbouring the feeling that he might have wanted me to set one or more of his poems, but for my own part not wanting to damage their already self-contained beauty. When Harry sent me his translation of *Claf Abercuawg* I decided to set it, but in a different way. Not with a singing voice, but by following closely his 'translated' imagery and poetic structure. In turn translating those into musical motifs. Thus recurrent images have musical equivalents, not only the cuckoo's loud song, but the narrator's spirit, his desolation, his physical affliction, and the murmuring of the sea. The recurrent harmonics (especially focussed on E, D and high A) mirror the text. The poem is a monologue, a lament, and folksong-like in its repetition and permutation of short phrases and musical gestures. This modal musical material is also designed to evoke that most typical accompaniment to Welsh lyricism – the Harp. There is, to my current recollection, no quoted material at all.

(SC): That's very interesting because on one of the pages of handwritten sketches that I have for Outcast, Shelbye's name is written very prominently next to a series of fragments, some sub-fragments of which ended up in the final score. There is also some material which appears in both Felix Namque and Outcast, albeit with variations. Perhaps it is the case that Shelbye's influence on Felix Namque bled over into the beginnings of work on Outcast but any quoted material didn't make it into the final piece? It would be very interesting to know more about the relationship between Felix Namque and Outcast, and whether this 'cross-pollination' is common in your work when pieces are composed in close proximity to one another.

(MF): There were times during the writing of *Outcast*, when I was also making adjustments to *Felix Namque*, and deciding there to include the references to Shelbye. The sources of both pieces lie in the distant past, and their modalities – part of

extract from *Outcast*

their created identity – are relatively close. Whilst each work has, to my mind, an individual identity and character, I am nonetheless their common creator. Cross-pollination is almost inevitable, even when not intentional. The overall structure and context, in which even very similar musical-gestures might appear, should usually clarify degrees of difference. I did not intend the two pieces to sound 'meaningfully related' to each other. But I am certainly not averse to cross-referencing within a single piece, as a means of unifying its structure. I have also, several times alluded to earlier pieces, as memories or reminders within a different 'narrative'. I would not say it is a 'common' occurrence as I usually try to leave a gap between writing one piece and researching and composing another, but it is not always a perfect world!

Michael Finnissy (b. 1946) created the music department of the London School of Contemporary Dance and has been an associated composer with many British dance companies, including London Contemporary Dance Theatre, Ballet Rambert, Strider and Second Stride. He has taught composition at Dartington Summer School, Winchester College, the junior department of the Royal College of Music, Chelsea College of Art, the Royal Academy of Music, University of Southampton, and as a guest lecturer at many colleges and universities. He has also been musician in residence to the Victorian College of Arts and to the City of Caulfield in Australia. Finnissy has been featured composer at the Bath, Huddersfield, and Almeida Festivals and his works are performed and broadcast worldwide. In 1988 he received a BBC Proms commission, *Red Earth*, for the BBC Symphony Orchestra. In February 1999 Harvard University in Boston devoted a festival to his music. Several world premières also took place at the 1999 Music Factory Festival in Bergen. In 1990 Finnissy was appointed President of the International Society of Contemporary Music. He was re-elected in 1993 and in 1998 was made an honorary member of the ISCM. 1996, his 50th birthday year, saw recitals of the complete piano music by Ian Pace, recordings of orchestral and chamber works on NMC and the publication by Ashgate of *Uncommon Ground*, a detailed book about Finnissy's music. Michael's music is published by United Music Publishing, Oxford University Press, and Verlag Neue Musik.

michaelfinnissy.co.uk

English guitarist and composer **Sam Cave** is one of the guitar's leading exponents of new music. Cave's solo and ensemble collaborations with composers include music by George Holloway, Lisa Illean, Michael Finnissy, Christopher Fox, John Croft, Alastair Putt, Gabriel Prokofiev, Bára Gísladóttir, Darren Bloom, Leo Chadburn, Christian Mason, Rolf Hind, and Frank Denyer.

Cave's performances have taken him to some of the most exciting venues and festivals in the UK and overseas, with appearances at Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, Nonclassical, The Institute of Contemporary Arts, LSO St Luke's, AVGARDE concert series in Norway, the Purcell Room at the Southbank Centre, Kings Place, Wigmore Hall, the Barbican, November Music in the Netherlands, the Giga-Hertz Festival in Karlsruhe Germany, and the Tianjin May Festival in Tianjin, China.

Cave was a Park Lane Group Young Artist in 2013 and has recorded for Another Timbre, Metier, and First Hand Records. His playing has been broadcast on both Late Junction and multiple times on The New Music Show on BBC Radio 3.

Equally at home as a soloist or in mixed chamber music, Cave is a member of the leading new music groups Octandre Ensemble and Apartment House, and he regularly performs with many other groups at the forefront of new music, including Riot Ensemble and Explore Ensemble.

Cave studied at the Royal College of Music in London with financial assistance from The Countess of Munster Musical Trust and graduated from the University of Southampton with the Edward Wood memorial prize in music, he also holds a PhD in composition from Brunel University of London. He was an LSO Soundhub Associate Composer for 2017–2022 and his music is published by Babelscores.

samcave.com

Diego Castro-Magas is a Chilean guitarist, researcher and educator specialising in contemporary performance and artistic research. Born in Chile in 1978, he has developed a distinguished career combining academic rigour with artistic innovation.

Castro-Magas studied guitar with Oscar Ohlsen at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (1997–2000) and Ricardo Gallén and Fernando Rodríguez at Universitat Ramon Llull in Spain (2003–2005). He also took private lessons in contemporary electric-guitar under Daryl Buckley. In 2016, Castro-Magas completed his PhD in Contemporary Performance under Philip Thomas at the University of Huddersfield, where he received the Vice-Chancellor's Award for his thesis *Body, mimesis and image: a gesture-based approach to interpretation in contemporary guitar performing practice*.

As an advocate of the music of our time, Castro-Magas has collaborated with composers such as Brian Ferneyhough,

James Dillon, Michael Finnissy, Aaron Cassidy, Wieland Hoban, James Erber, Michael E. Edgerton, Bryn Harrison, John Croft, Eric Egan, Christopher Fox, Hilda Paredes, and Clemens Gadenstätter, among many others, delivering performances and premières of their guitar pieces. He has performed at contemporary music festivals in Chile, Venezuela, Cuba, Germany, Spain, Estonia and the UK. He has also recorded several solo and collaborative albums, published by labels such as Huddersfield Contemporary Records/NMC Recordings, Another Timbre and First Hand Records.

Castro-Magas is Associate Professor in Music at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. He is currently the Principal Investigator of the project 'Radically Embodied Performance as Musical Structure', supported by the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions programme and hosted by Orpheus Instituut, Ghent (2025–2027).

diegocastromagas.com

Vickers Bovey Guitar Duo have been described as performers 'with truly uncanny unanimity' (Ivan Hewett, *Daily Telegraph*) and 'with astounding exquisiteness' (Paul Driver, *Sunday Times*). Julian Vickers and Dan Bovey first met studying at Birmingham Conservatoire where they both received First Class Honours and the Principal's Prize. They continued their studies with a joint Masters at the Royal Academy of Music, London, graduating with Distinction and the Performance Diploma in July 2016.

The duo have been featured on BBC Radio 3's In Tune and Late Junction. Past recipients of the IGF Young Artist Platform, the Countess of Munster and Help Musicians UK awards, they have performed extensively internationally and around the UK including at Wigmore Hall, St James' Piccadilly, St John's Smith Square, Courtauld Gallery, Kings Place (London Guitar Festival), The Sage (North-East Guitar Festival), The Lake District Summer Music Festival and Kings Lynn Festival.

United by a love of new and contemporary music, the duo have commissioned and premièred numerous works, including Michael Finnissy's *Normal Deviates*, Joe Cutler's *Everyday Music* and Mario Ferraro's *On That Old Oak by the Roadside*. The duo also have a long term collaboration with Ryan Probert, whose transfixing large scale works *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*, *Eight Views of the Four Seasons* and *The Fields Where Silence Has Lease* (BBC commission) have been performed over 30 times, in concert halls, libraries, factories and schools. The complete set of Ryan's *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* formed the duo's début album, released in April 2016.

vickersbovey.co.uk

Winners of the prestigious Guitar Foundation of America International Ensemble Competition 2023, the **Mēla Guitar Quartet** are known for their imaginative, engaging programming, ingenious arrangements and commissioning celebrated original works. Hailed for their 'collective technical brilliance and preternatural ensemble making' (*Gramophone*), the quartet have released four albums: a collection of original arrangements, *Overtures & Dances*, recorded with spatial audio specialist label TRPTK; the complete guitar quartets of composer/author Anthony Burgess; the complete guitar chamber works of Stephen Dodgson, both with Naxos; the self-released album *Pluck, Strum, and Hammer!* Notable performances have included the Southbank Centre's Purcell Room, Kings Place Hall One, St James' Church Piccadilly, the Barbican Centre's Milton Court, St George's Bristol, Westminster Abbey, Soest, Germany and, of course, Jimi Hendrix's bedroom. In 2019 the quartet embarked on an eight concert tour of China, including Shanghai Oriental Arts Centre, Changsha concert hall and Tianjin Grand Theatre. The quartet completed an eight-week tour of America and Canada as part of their GFA winners' prize in Spring 2025, including a USA première performance of Anthony Burgess' *Concerto Grosso* for four guitars and orchestra with the Stanford Philharmonic at the Bing Concert Hall, California. The quartet formed in 2015 as graduates of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the Royal Academy of Music. They became International Guitar Festival Young Artists 2015-16, then Park Lane Group young artists 2018-19 and Royal Over-Seas League chamber music finalists 2019.

melagq.com

THE ASCENSION

All works published by Verlag Neue Musik, Berlin

Recorded at the Church of the Ascension, Plumstead, London, UK,
23 May 2025 (*Normal Deviates*),
1 June 2025 (*Albion on the Road to Hell*),
3 June 2025 (*Nasiye, Two Cut-Ups of Three Fantasias by Alonso Mudarra*, *Felix Namque*, *Song 17*),
19 June 2025 (*Outcast*)

Produced by **Sam Cave**, **John Croft** (Chiaro Audio), **Michael Finnissy** and **Johan Lofving** (*Outcast*)
Recorded, edited and mastered by **John Croft**
24bit, 96kHz high resolution recording, editing and mastering

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Artwork by **David Murphy** (FHR)

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As always with a project of this size there are many people without whom nothing would have been possible. On behalf of all those involved in making this recording I would like to thank the following organisations and individuals for their invaluable support:

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With loving gratitude to my father, Ken Cave (1946–2025), for everything you have done for me.
Sam Cave, Torrington, Devon, September 2025

FHR thanks Peter Bromley